

Laura, at least 10 years later: Nothing has changed

By

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One of the things that Laura was sure of was that all of this should have worked out differently. After walking away from the mess that was her experience in college, she was sure that things had to get better. Sometimes she wondered if she had been misled by the saccharine television programs of her youth. She liked the world so much better when she saw it in terms of mop top Muppet monsters and shoes and boots that cared about one another enough to share.

This is not, however, the Electric Company, she thought as she girded herself before walking through the doors to the coffee shop where she worked.

She hated opening the store. She pressed past the door, re locking it behind her and watched the floor as she made long fast strides toward the back room which she planned on closing tightly behind her until she was ready to turn the lights on.

Once inside the room she let her pack fall gently to the floor, and took a seat in the big lounge chair that someone had placed there. This was just a job, she thought to herself. This is just a job.

She rolled her head back and let it rest on the chair. Face pointing upward to the ceiling. She closed her eyes for a moment and breathed in the stale smell of the little room. It was a storage room, filled with the usual things found in such places. Extra crates of those coffee shop cups that aren't quite paper and aren't quite Styrofoam. A case of sugar in little packets. Three cases of plastic stir straws.

Laura smirked a little bit, thinking of the plastic stir straws. Cassandra, the woman who owned the shop, insisted she order a new case of little stir straws each and every month. Laura did so dutifully, even though she knew there was no reason to keep so many of the little things in stock. In her observation, only about 35 or so straws had actually been used in the months they'd been open.

But, Cassandra was a smart businesswoman—or at least, she had a pretty comprehensive business plan... and if that plan called for a fresh case of plastic stir straws each and every month. Laura didn't want to cause trouble. She'd only been managing the shop for a few weeks. While she'd been friendly with Cassandra, she hardly could say they were friends.

Laura exhaled forcefully, and then sat up in the chair. It was time to start brewing.

Always with the coffee shops, she sighed, thinking to herself. She worked her way through college in the coffee shop, she worked her way through rehab in the coffee shop, she worked her way through recovery in a coffee shop.

Things had been going well, too, for the shop. For whatever reason, things had really caught on for the girls, and somehow, the impossible had happened. In a sea of corporate coffee and trendy shops, there little shop, humble and upfront, caught on.

A crash rang from the main room of the shop, and an alarm started to blare, startling Laura up from her seat in the old chair, instantly wide-eyed, alert, and all of the lamentations and self-pity she'd be feeling were pressed back into the recesses of her mind.

Feeling paralyzed was nothing new to Laura. She's stood helplessly years ago while a crazed lunatic that she had called her boyfriend brutally murdered her roommate. She felt that familiar swelling sense of panic welling in her throat, like a kerchief tied-too tightly around her neck. Adrenaline-inspired electric impulses danced in her fingertips as she strained to listen past the blaring shop alarm for any clue as to what was happening in the main room of the shop.

She could feel the panic threatening to overwhelm her-- pull its safe and incapacitating hood over her eyes. She let her head droop and swirl while the darkness easily took over her consciousness and then suddenly she snapped alert realizing that, for whatever reason, a 2 foot long tire-iron was propped up against a shelf in the storeroom. It had probably been left by the shop's previous owner... a lot of weird stuff had.

Laura swallowed past the lump in her throat and felt her back expand as she quietly took a deep breath. Never again, she found herself thinking. She crept over and picked up the tire iron. Feeling the cool

metal in her hands, she thought again of her roommate. This time it's for Janice, she thought.

She pushed open the storeroom door a crack and tried to peek through to the main floor of the shop in search of the intruder. She didn't see anyone, but was aware of someone around the corner behind the counter obscured from her vision punching wildly on the alarm key pad.

Laura snuck along the corner, walking lightly on her sneakers, making no sound discernible above the wailing alarm, crept over to the corner. At the edge of the wall, she lifted the tire iron over her head, and in one motion stepped around the corner and swung wildly at the alarm and the intruder.

Mugs and dishes and indeed the shelf itself fell and broke, some smashed by the impact of the tire iron the rest broken by their short trip to the floor.

As luck would have it, Cassandra spotted Laura's attack at the last second and instinctively jumped out of the way, shrieking in surprise as the tire iron bore into the stack of mugs a few inches from where her head had been only previously.

The sound of smashing mugs broke Laura's spell and she stared now, dumbfounded at the mess she'd made. The mess she'd made on the floor, the mess she'd made of the mugs, and of the shop. It was about the mess she'd made of everything, she thought. The tire iron

slipped from where it hung dangling from her hand and clattered as it hit the tile.

The women looked at one another for a second, and then both turned and looked at the 5 inch gash the tire iron had made in the drywall behind the shelf that had been knocked off the wall.

Laura was also not unfamiliar with the empty feeling left behind from the quick reversal of an endorphin rush—the feeling still that comes from rapidly cycling between hero and goat something of her best friend. She lamely reached up and punched a button on the alarm keypad, ceasing its wailing; then let her arm fall limply back to her side.

Cassandra stammered a bit from the surprise of it all, and then leaned back on the adjoining wall, letting her body slide down and sit on the floor, and crying and laughing at the same time.

Laura, the familiar swell of the absence of feeling welling in the pit of her stomach, spoke.

“I guess there are a few things I need to talk to you about.”

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